



European  
Eye on  
Radicalization



## A Look at Non-Violent Extremism in the UK: The Case of Abu Suhaib Bassam

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Editorial Board

# Abu Suhaib Bassam versus Birthday Cakes - A Look at Non-violent Extremism in the UK

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## The Frontline and the Hinterland

Scarred by several terrorist attacks, the UK has created a comprehensive, focused and generally successful set of frontline security policies and operations.

For every attacker who slips through the net, many more are apprehended at the plotting stage and brought to justice. According to the latest numbers from London's Metropolitan Police, no fewer than ten Islamist terror plots have been stopped since the attack in Westminster in March 2017.<sup>1</sup>

This sharp end work was controversial in the past. The magnitude of the threat was debated, proposals for strong anti-terrorist measures were hotly contested, and "root causes" excuses for murder were popular in the aftermath of the Iraq war.

Now, after the atrocities in Manchester and London in 2017, times have changed. Broadly speaking, there is a consensus that extensive and intensive security operations are part of life in today's Britain. If even young girls enjoying a pop concert are a target, everyone is a target.

The approach to "non-violent extremism" is another matter. In this hinterland of jihad, there is no consensus and no end of controversy too.

The British government does have a view. At the highest levels, extremist preaching outside terrorist circles has been seen as part of the problem for many years.

However, the government must contend with Parliament and the public. In both camps, views are deeply fractured.

On the left, one can find appeasement of radicals, or even strong support on the extremes. Famously, the Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn has called the terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah his "friends".

On the right, for some no measure is ever quite hawkish enough. On the far right fringes, Islam itself, and by consequence Muslims too, are the problem.

In the diverse middle ground, sensible people can have very different views about the best way forward.

The outcome is debilitating discord. Developing and enforcing comprehensive policies to address the hinterland is still a contested work in progress.

In the context of a liberal society which cherishes freedom of speech and religion, this situation is no surprise. The discord should be welcomed, really, a traditional liberal might maintain.

Yet the status quo is also alarming. Some extremist preachers despise the very freedoms they are using in their mission to promote social division and alienation, rejection of the West, anger, and hatred. This is problematic in itself. In a country plagued by terrorism, it is dangerous as well.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://policyexchange.org.uk/pxevents/the-colin-cramphorn-memorial-lecture-by-mark-rowley/>

## The Case of Abu Suhaib Bassam



The preacher Abu Suhaib Bassam makes for a useful exemplar in this field.

Like a number of his fellows in the UK, Bassam studied Islam in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s under the famous sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani.

After his studies, he came to the UK to spread the *dawah* propagation message. He is now a prominent preacher who has served as an imam at the Wycombe Islamic Society (WISE) in High Wycombe, a town outside London. The town has been a recruiting ground for Islamic State, including young men who had worshipped at WISE. Bassam also tours mosques around the country, including the controversial Green Lane Mosque in Birmingham.

Some of Bassam's sermons are recorded and uploaded to YouTube, where they have received thousands of views. He is also promoted by Peace TV, the broadcasting operation of the Indian extremist Zakir Naik.

It is important to note that Bassam strongly and genuinely opposes terrorists. In a powerful challenge, he likens them to the *khawarij*, the fanatical enemies of the caliphate in Islam's first century. He specifically rejects extremists such as the al-Muhajiroun group of Anjem Choudary and the radical party Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Yet many of his other views are deeply corrosive. In fact, his vision of an ideal world is not that far removed from what Islamic State tried to create. In this too he has many fellows in Britain who studied Islam in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s.

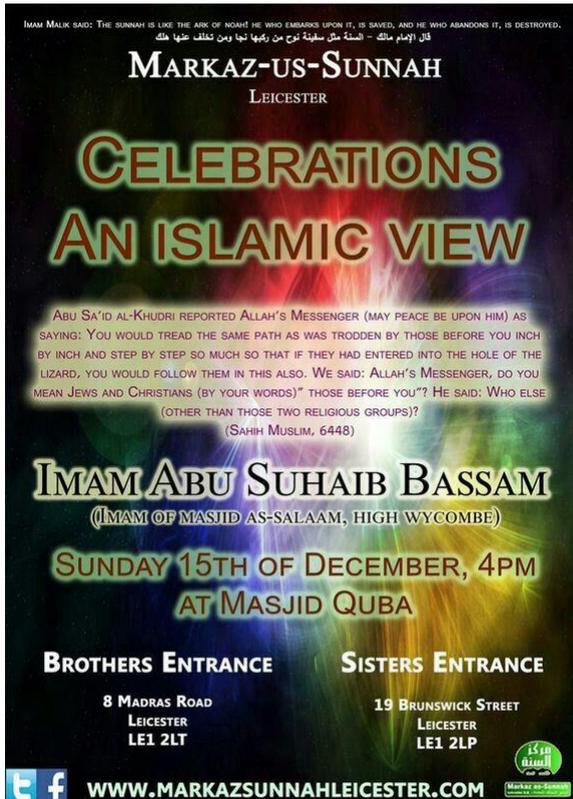
### Separatist Messages

Bassam's advocacy of social separatism is especially striking. His messages are stark, uncompromising, and harsh.

Consider a recorded talk at the Al Quba mosque in Leicester in 2013.<sup>2</sup> "Imitating the *kuffar*" is Bassam's urgent concern, starting with Jews and Christians above all. His warning is accompanied by a firm demand that Muslims must strive to be different from the disbelievers.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZlb6\\_74Whk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZlb6_74Whk)



A flyer advertising the event. It presents a “hadith” many in Britain would find offensive. It reads: “Abu Sa’id al-Khudri reported Allah’s messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: you would tread the same path as was trodden by those before you inch by inch and step by step so much so that if they entered into the hole of the lizard, you would follow them in this also. We said: Allah’s messenger, do you mean Jews and Christians (by your words). Those before you? He said: who else (other than those two religious groups)?” Bassam proceeded to recount the hadith in his talk.

Bassam’s collection of bugbears extends all the way down to innocent and mundane activities which bring simple joy.

For example, even Muslim mothers who make birthday cakes for their children and decorate them with candles are “imitating the *kuffar*”. They may do this out of ignorance or pure whim, he says, or because of the environment around them, or even because of the influence of Satan. Whatever the reason may be, they should do not do this, for it is “adopting Western society”.

Cake and candles are not the only issue. For Bassam, *any* birthday celebration is wrong. “You’re not allowed to celebrate birthdays”, he insists. For good measure, he specifies that “buying gifts for someone on their birthday is not allowed. To celebrate and participate in another person’s birthday is not allowed.”

On Valentine’s Day, a Muslim who receives a gift of flowers should throw them in the rubbish. This too is not allowed.

Easter is another danger. Bassam is upset that some Muslims buy Easter eggs for their children. This is another unacceptable imitation.

Christmas is an especially perilous time. Muslims should not send or accept the season’s cards, sing its songs, have a tree in their homes, or give or receive presents. Muslims who do so are showing “the weakness of their hearts”.

The prohibitions extend to children, who are “not allowed” to participate in Christmas gift exchanges in their schools.

All of this is very serious for Bassam. A Muslim merely saying “Merry Christmas”, for instance, is actually committing an offense that is worse than praising stealing, drinking, or fornication.

These views are unusual and made for consternation in a country where Christmas has become an important festival for all, including atheists and people of faiths other than Christianity. In fact, in a sign of these times, a report in December 2017 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims was titled “A Very Merry Muslim Christmas”.<sup>3</sup>

Marriage too must be minded carefully. As the Leicester talk proceeds, Bassam notes that Muslim men may marry Christian and Jewish women, but the women must convert to Islam. Consider the dangers, Bassam warns, if a Christian or Jewish woman retains her faith and then leaves the marriage, intending to bring the children up in that faith. She can do this in Britain, as she is protected by secular law. This risk must not be taken. She must convert to Islam:

I could marry from the females of the Christians or the Jews, but on one condition. That is *muhsanat*. But there is a hidden condition that the people do not know about. That is the hidden condition, for the prophet, he said, take care of your women, that is, they are like slaves, they are not slaves, they are like slaves, and always the slave follows his master. Do you understand what I’m saying?

And at the time of the prophet, when Islam is powerful and the Muslim countries are powerful, and the upper word is for Islam, when you marry the non-Muslim from the Christians or the Jews, then anything that would happen, you have the upper word. So, you are the master, whereas these days you are the slave. The rules serve them.

In case of separation or divorce, where are the children going to go? According to the non-Muslim law, it goes to them. In Islamic law they will have another type of judgement. So, even that she will have the custody, she’s not allowed to teach them non-Islam, she’s not allowed to take them to the non-Muslim places. Do you understand? So the upper hand is for the non-Islam, for the non-Islam.

Because of that, we say it is not allowed to marry a Christian woman or a Jewish woman until she embraces Islam.

A shocking passage follows:

You have heard about, as well, the law of raping your wife. How can you rape your wife? I’ve never heard about raping your wife. It’s my wife, what do you mean raping her? That means I am making a marital relationship with her without her consent. So she’s got the right now, she’s got the upper hand. “I can’t give you today, I can’t give you tonight.” So if you did it, she could file you with a judge and then that’s it, it’s rape. How can it be? It’s Islamic law, it doesn’t really work. We marry for that sake, to secure myself. So, I am ready for her and she is ready for me. So this is one of the main rights for myself.

In another talk, apparently recorded at the Luton Islamic Center in 2013, Bassam sanctions domestic abuse of a wife who does not accept verbal admonishments:<sup>4</sup>

Don’t hit her like you hit your slave. You understand from this what? You are allowed to hit. Do you understand me? You are allowed to. Because if she does not listen to your admonishing, you’re allowed to hit her. But don’t hit her, that hitting, which is going to break her bones, or hit the face, or leave a mark.

One must note that he sets limits. But they too are objectionable. Can a wife do the same to a man who does not listen to her admonishments? Of course not. Preachers like Bassam never say this.

Moreover, the limits are probably unlikely to restrain an angry and unstable man seeking divine approval for violence at home.

To make it even worse, in general terms Bassam counsels British Muslims against calling the police in domestic disputes, even in severe cases.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://appgbritishmuslims.org/publications/>

<sup>4</sup> From 38:30 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SwcaADgkOo>

## Bassam's Better Society

The kind of society Bassam does want is outlined in some of his other talks. It is a disturbing vision.

A graphic example can be found in another Leicester talk in 2013, where he enthusiastically supports the most brutal *sharia* punishments, including the public execution of "bandits" by crucifixion.<sup>5</sup>

People who have "insulted the prophet" will also face death in Bassam's ideal system. In a talk at the BD5 mosque in Bradford in 2012, he says:<sup>6</sup>

But if you have insulted the prophet and you repented, yes, Allah will forgive you for that, but still you're gonna be killed because the prophet, he is not there to go and forgive you. Do you understand that? That's an Islamic state, insulting the Prophet is death penalty according to sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah.

According to some other scholars, they say no, there is no death penalty, he will be as well exempted from that if he repented to Allah. But because the prophet is not alive, he is not alive to forgive you, his right is preserved for him. So you will be killed but not killed as a *kafir*. If you repented that means we pray upon you, we shroud you because you repented to Allah. But because you have insulted the messenger of Allah, death penalty is yours. In an Islamic state brothers, in Islam, and I keep repeating this, not in a state like this, OK? We're not really abiding by an Islamic state. *Inshallah*, one day we will abide.

In the same Bradford talk Bassam also says that "sorcerers" should be put to death:<sup>7</sup>

This magician, if he is in Islam, if he's been caught, and he does it out of magic, then death is his penalty. In Islam, death is his penalty.

At a conference in Birmingham's Green Lane Mosque in 2016, he comes to the defense of the prophet - as he sees it - once again:<sup>8</sup>

And when you curse the prophet of Allah in Islam, your penalty is death.

Shia Muslims too would not fare well in Bassam's ideal society. Bassam loathes Shi'ite Islam. In another talk at the Al Quba mosque in Leicester 2013, he lets loose:<sup>9</sup>

You know, the Shia, their religion is actually an insult to the religion of Islam. We're not inciting hatred and killing towards them, but inciting hatred towards their *manhaj*, their methodology. Their *deen* [religion] is not the *deen* of Islam. Their prophet is not prophet Mohammed.

In another YouTube video titled "The Deceptive Reality Of The Extreme Shia", apparently recorded at the Luton Islamic Centre in 2015, Bassam uses the disparaging term *rafidha* for Shias and says Shias in Iraq:<sup>10</sup>

"...have done much worse damage than any other enemies of Allah who had conquered the Muslim lands. And that is including even the Jews, who had massacred in Palestine and they have done what they have done in Gaza."

In the same talk he approvingly cites what he says are these distressing words of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century scholar Abu Bakr ibn al-Arabi:

One of the great scholars, called Abu Bakr ibn al-Arabi al-Maliki, *rahimahullah* [Allah have mercy upon him], he says, and this is something that I've read a long time ago, and it was actually as well revived by our sheikh Mashoor in one of his lectures, that is, he said in his *Al-'Awasim min al-Qawasim* [Defense Against Disaster] that the issue between us and *rafidha*, it will not be solved except through

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<sup>5</sup> From 24:50 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI98Avn-9c4>

<sup>6</sup> From 47:15 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIZ6VSZFL74>

<sup>7</sup> From 56:30 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIZ6VSZFL74>

<sup>8</sup> From 1:03:08 at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6qvlBN8M\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6qvlBN8M_0)

<sup>9</sup> From 57:26 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI98Avn-9c4>

<sup>10</sup> From 0:42 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dt9TTWK-We0>

the heat of the sword, not the coldness of the debate. Do you understand what he is saying? The heat of the sword will solve the matter. Not the coldness of the debates.

Bassam follows up with this charge:

And another scholar, he said, verily, who are you going to debate with? People whom [sic] their religion is *taqiyya*, lying? How can you debate people like that? *Taqiyya* means they show you something and they hide something. And they are liars. They don't really hesitate to lie against anybody. Allah or anybody.

...

Any person who doesn't know that, you're simple, brother. You have to revise your knowledge and make sure that you understand. And if you're upset we're talking about this, "you're splitting the *ummah*" [community of believers], brothers, if you don't unite the *ummah* upon the Salafi *manhaj*, you are disuniting the *ummah*. Do you understand that?

Bassam does not support violence against Shia Muslims merely because they are Shias and has made this clear.

Nonetheless, his rhetoric is careless at best when the Middle East is riven by Sunni-Shia conflicts.

### Returning to the Frontlines

Coming out of the hinterland and back to the frontlines, Bassam opposes today's terrorists but he does speak up for the concept of jihad.

For example, in a talk at the Al-Huda mosque in Bradford in 2012, he says "fighting for the sake of Allah is the ultimate".<sup>11</sup>

You know, fighting for the sake of Allah is the ultimate. When the person prays, and the person, he does his *ibada* (religious duties), he will be willing to go ahead and sacrifice his life and his wealth in danger for the sake of Allah.

In another tape, Bassam taunts Muslims for being too weak for jihad, like "the Jews".<sup>12</sup> He turns to the prophet's reported words on weakness for an example:

The love of this worldly life and the hatred of death. And this is the symptom and the disease of the Jews, same thing. They would never wish for death.

And us at the moment, the Muslims have been clinging heavily to earth with wealth and property. If you tell them to go to make jihad (laughs), you know, the prophet, he says, you who doesn't make jihad, who doesn't talk about jihad, he has died upon one of the hypocrisy ways.

But, at this moment, I would say maybe these people, when they talk about jihad, they are actually lying to themselves.

I mean, you want to say to me that whenever jihad is on you're gonna be ready? Ask yourself properly. You're gonna leave your children, your house and everything for the sake of that jihad where everybody should be involved? Are you gonna be ready to expose yourself to the enemy of Allah with your sword?

In a third talk apparently recorded at the Al-Huda mosque in East London in 2014, Bassam opens by saying jihad is "the ultimate":<sup>13</sup>

And jihad is the ultimate. It is the ultimate of your *ibada* (religious duties). And I'm talking about the jihad *fi sabilillah* (on the path of Allah), which means the jihad that is fighting, sacrificing yourself and your wealth, for the sake of making Allah's word to be the uppermost.

Like some other Salafi preachers, Bassam seems to find himself in a theological bind. He cannot forsake jihad and must praise it, even though he opposes today's terrorists. It is a dangerous stance.

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<sup>11</sup> From 3:00 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azu3O5p0aak>

<sup>12</sup> From 2:30 at <https://tifrib.com/abu-suhaib-bassam-alee-abu-haj/>

<sup>13</sup> From 1:20 at <http://www.istigaamah.net/wp-content/uploads/audio/khawarij%202014.MP3>

In addition, Bassam spreads conspiracy theories which increase mistrust of the authorities.

For example, in a Q&A session after the Al-Huda mosque talk in East London, Bassam is asked if he thinks non-Muslims are helping Islamic State.<sup>14</sup> Rather than answering with a simple “no”, he notes that some scholars do say “the ones running the show are the *kuffar*, the Baath”.

He adds “now I am not really here to say that these words are right or wrong. But definitely there are some people who are in the shadow background who are not maybe Muslims, running the show.”

In another talk after the murder of the British soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013, he says he thinks the killers might have been “working for the government”.<sup>15</sup>

### **Losing Saudi and British Ground**

In Saudi Arabia, Bassam’s version of Islam is losing ground as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman introduces sweeping reforms.

Even Valentine’s Day, a serious worry for Bassam, is now gaining acceptance in the Kingdom. This year it received warm words from none other a former head of the religious police in Mecca:<sup>16</sup>

Speaking to Arab News, Sheikh Ahmed Qasim Al-Ghamdi, former president of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Makkah, endorsed Valentine’s Day as a social celebration similar to the National Day and Mother’s Day.

“All these are common social matters shared by humanity and are not religious issues that require the existence of a religious proof to permit it,” he said.

Describing love as a natural feeling, the cleric said that Valentine’s Day celebrated “a positive aspect of the human being.”

This is remarkable. In earlier years, the religious police suppressed Valentine’s Day celebrations.

Al-Ghamdi added these words, which can only sting the likes of Bassam:

He rejected the view that marking the day is an imitation of non-Muslims and said: “Even greeting peaceful non-Muslims in their special religious holidays is permitted without participating in a forbidden act that contradicts Islam.”

In Britain, the authorities are grappling with the problems of “non-violent extremism” yet again. Proposing definitions and approaches is one of the main tasks of Sara Khan, the new head of the Commission on Extremism.<sup>17</sup>

The ideology of Bassam and his close fellows makes for an important part of the process. Their thinking is plainly divisive and potentially dangerous. It serves well as a definition of the kind of extremism that should lose ground in Britain.

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<sup>14</sup> From 2:04:20 at <http://www.istigaamah.net/wp-content/uploads/audio/khawarij%202014.MP3>

<sup>15</sup> From 4:00 at [http://www.istigaamah.net/wp-content/uploads/audio/Abu%20Suhaib/General%20Talks/Fitna%20of%20killing%20\(woolwich\).mp3](http://www.istigaamah.net/wp-content/uploads/audio/Abu%20Suhaib/General%20Talks/Fitna%20of%20killing%20(woolwich).mp3)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1246766/saudi-arabia>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sara-khan-to-lead-commission-for-countering-extremism>